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New Incentives Take Center Stage for Montana at Sundance Film Festival

Helena, MT – February 2, 2006 – The Montana Film Office teamed up with members of Governor Schweitzer’s Film and Television Advisory Council to help spread the word about Montana’s new film incentives at the Sundance Film Festival. The annual Sundance Film Festival which is held in Park City, Utah each January is considered the premier U.S. showcase for American and international independent film. “It is taking advantage of opportunities like those at Sundance to educate national and international filmmakers about the new tax incentives available in Montana that will spur more film production in Montana,” cites Governor Brian Schweitzer. “These efforts help us to realize the intent of our aggressive economic plan designed to create jobs, keep Montana university graduates in the state, and bring new money to Montana's economy.”

Last year, the Legislature passed the “Big Sky on the Big Screen Act,” a tax incentive package designed to encourage film production in Montana. The measure gives production companies a 12 percent incentive rebate on all Montana labor hired for film production and an eight percent rebate on all production-related Montana expenditures including lodging, equipment rental, fuel, lumber and construction materials. Montana’s new tax incentives, coupled with the federal incentives that passed in The American Jobs Creation Act of 2004, will assist in making filming production in Montana much more affordable and attainable.

It was under this specter of saving up to \$1 million per film that council members Chris Arnold, Chris Cronyn and Cinda Holt joined Film Office staffer John Ansotegui at the Outreach table at the Filmmaker’s Lodge to educate filmmakers that Montana is now a competitive place for film production. “We are pleased we have such a dedicated group of individuals to work on film and television opportunities for the state,” says Commerce Director Anthony J. Preite. “We see their involvement as a critical component of being successful in attracting business and are appreciative of the networking opportunities they sought out on behalf of Montana at Sundance.”

In addition to the invaluable face-to-face networking, Montana made certain information about their new tax incentives were strategically placed on information tables at many of the film venues in Park City. “Throughout all our interactions, our goal was to provide the filmmakers with the information needed for them to have a practical and more profitable alternative to taking their productions across the border into Canada,” noted council member attendee Chris Cronyn.

In addition, the Images of Nature Gallery was once again the venue for a western hospitality reception co-hosted by Montana and their *Film The West* marketing consortium of Wyoming, Idaho and South Dakota. Upwards of 200 active filmmakers with projects likely in the works were in attendance. Once again providing Montana unfettered access to filmmakers.

Asked about the overall exposure and experience, Chris Arnold explains, “Making the effort and creating a presence are the most important things. It was encouraging that news about our incentives ranged from genuine interest to a more urgent ‘Overnight FedEx your production guide and all your incentive info This sounds like what we have been waiting for.’”

Montana was represented at the film festival with a screening of “Don’t Come Knocking” starring Sam Shepard and directed by venerable director, Wim Wenders. The film, which was partly shot in Butte in 2004, infused \$4 million into Montana’s economy over the course of the filming and the cinematography was beautifully shot lending a favorable portraiture of Butte. In addition, another Montana production that was featured at Sundance was the short film "High Plains Winter" by MSU professor Cindy Stillwell.

From 1998-2003, Montana’s film industry generated \$53 million in film production spending within the state. Film production created 903 full-time equivalent jobs in the film industry and 444 full-time equivalent jobs in the general economy. During those five years, the film industry contributed \$4.3 million of tax revenue to the state.

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